United Nations S/2016/1072

Security Council

Distr.: General
19 December 2016

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. In a letter dated 23 December 2013 (S/2013/759), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa until 31 December 2016 and requested me to submit a report every six months on the implementation of its mandate. Following my letter to the Council dated 14 January 2016 (S/2016/88) on the strategic review of the Office of my Special Envoy for the Sahel, the Council requested me, on 28 January 2016, to proceed with the merger of the two offices into the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and asked me to provide an update on the implementation of the mandate of UNOWAS in my next report (see S/2016/89). The present report covers the period from 30 July to 31 December 2016 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of UNOWAS and the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel (S/2015/866).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

A. Political and governance trends

2. Since my most recent report (S/2016/566), efforts to consolidate democracy and stability continued in the region. Noticeable progress was made in the political dialogue process in Guinea and in the development and implementation of key political, institutional and constitutional reforms in a number of countries, including Benin and Senegal. Elections were held in Cabo Verde, the Gambia and Ghana.

3. Cabo Verde successfully conducted peaceful local elections on 4 September and a presidential election on 2 October. Observers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union applauded the elections as professional, fair, inclusive and transparent. With a 35 per cent turnout, incumbent President Jorge Carlos De Almeida Fonseca secured 74 per cent of ballots cast, while the opposition Movement for Democracy party reversed the 15-year dominance of the African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde by winning the majority of seats in Parliament.

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4. In the Gambia, an ECOWAS mission in July, an African Union mission in September and a mission from the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights in September expressed concern about the absence of conditions for a free and fair election. Subsequent requests by the European Union and ECOWAS to deploy electoral experts were rejected by the Government. The pre-electoral period was marked by cabinet reshuffles and the prosecution of senior officials for corruption and other offences. On 11 November, the Independent Electoral Commission announced the nomination of three presidential candidates: Adama Barrow of the Gambia Opposition for Electoral Reform; Mamma Kandeh of the Gambia Democratic Congress; and incumbent President, Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh Babil Mansa, representing the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation. The Gambia Opposition for Electoral Reform is a coalition of seven opposition parties and an independent female presidential candidate who agreed to put forward a common presidential candidate. On 2 December, the Commission announced Adama Barrow as the winner of the election. The same day, President Jammeh gave a concession speech and called Mr. Barrow to congratulate him. On 5 December, the Commission issued a statement revising the number of votes received by each candidate and stating that the errors had not affected the final outcome of the election. The Commission also reported that representatives of all three candidates had accepted the results during a meeting at Commission headquarters earlier that day. On 9 December, to the dismay of many Gambians and the international community, President Jammeh stated that he rejected the result of the election and called for a new election when resources would allow it. Since then, political tension has been very high in the Gambia, with security officers placed on standby throughout the country and a heightened sense of anxiety among the population.

5. In Ghana, seven political parties and their presidential candidates competed in the presidential and legislative elections that took place on 7 December. Nana Akufo-Addo won the presidential election, and incumbent President John Dramani Mahama conceded defeat on 9 December, when the Electoral Commission of Ghana announced the results. The voting was generally peaceful and orderly, as confirmed by a number of international observation missions that had been deployed, including from the African Union, ECOWAS, European Union, the Commonwealth and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The peace accord signed on 1 December by all seven political parties helped to lower political tensions and to prevent election-related violence.

6. In Guinea, following prolonged talks, the political parties agreed on 12 October to hold the long-overdue local elections in February 2017. During the talks, which took place against the backdrop of a recent rapprochement between President Alpha Condé and opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo, political actors reviewed the implementation of previous dialogue agreements and decided to, inter alia, reform the Independent National Electoral Commission and revise the electoral code to enhance the impartiality and credibility of future elections. The parties also agreed to provide compensation to victims of electoral violence.

7. In Benin, the Technical Commission appointed by President Talon to propose constitutional reforms finalized its report on 28 June, and preparations began for a referendum on the reform proposals to take place in early 2017. In Burkina Faso, members of the new Independent National Electoral Commission were sworn in on 27 July. On 21 October, the Government stated that an attempted coup d'état by

former members of the presidential guard was foiled by security forces. Meanwhile, the High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity, which was established in March to assist in creating conditions conducive to reconciliation and national unity and to examine human rights violations committed by State authorities between 1960 and 2015, has yet to become fully operational. With respect to investigations into the "popular uprising" in October 2014 and the failed coup d'état in September 2015, the High Court reported on 30 September that 24 ministers under the former regime had been indicted.

8. In Côte d'Ivoire, a constitutional amendment establishing a Senate and the position of Vice-President and making the nationality requirement for presidential eligibility more flexible was endorsed by referendum on 30 October. Progress was made in Guinea-Bissau when the political stakeholders signed agreements mediated by ECOWAS in September and October, committing them to breaking the prolonged political impasse. However, the agreements have yet to be implemented owing to continued mistrust between the parties. In Mauritania, a dialogue process, which was boycotted by several opposition parties and the extra-parliamentary opposition coalition National Forum for Democracy and Unity, ended on 20 October with the signing of a political agreement. The agreement foresaw several constitutional amendments, including the abolishment of the Senate and the creation of regional councils. In the Niger, the National Council for Political Dialogue, a framework for consultation on matters of national interest, decided on 4 October to postpone *sine die* the local elections scheduled for January 2017 and to initiate a review of the electoral process. The decision was criticized by the opposition, which boycotted the session.

9. In Nigeria, the Government continued its anti-corruption campaign led by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. The former Ministers of Aviation and of Defence were charged with money-laundering, while two Supreme Court justices and the Abia State Resident Electoral Commissioner were arrested on corruption charges.

10. In Senegal, members of the High Council of the *collectivités territoriales* were elected on 4 September, in line with a constitutional amendment approved in the referendum of 20 March. On 4 October, Senegal introduced the ECOWAS biometric identity card, which will also be used as a voter card. However, the adoption by Parliament of a bill to review the voters' register on 11 August triggered protracted debate. In Sierra Leone, the release of the final report of the Constitutional Review Committee, which was expected during the reporting period, was further delayed. The delimitation of constituency boundaries and preparations for a national civil and voter registration exercise ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections in early 2018 in Sierra Leone were sources of contention between the ruling and opposition parties. In Togo, there was no significant progress in the implementation of institutional and political reforms. The opposition continued to refuse initiatives by the High Commission for Reconciliation and Strengthening of National Unity, which on 21 July submitted reform proposals to the President of the country.

B. Security trends

11. The security situation in West Africa and the Sahel remained fragile due to the activities of violent extremist and terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram. Violent extremist groups based in Mali, including Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and Al Mourabitoun, continued to expand their geographical reach into the neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso and the Niger. In Burkina Faso, three soldiers and four civilians were killed in two attacks on 1 September and 12 October. In the Niger, several attacks were carried out between September and November by unidentified groups suspected of being based in Mali. On 6 October, an attack on a security post in an area hosting Malian refugees in Tazalit, Tahoua region, resulted in the death of 22 soldiers. The same week, an American aid worker was kidnapped in Abalak, Tahoua region. On 16 October, a high-security prison near the capital city of Niamey was attacked in what appeared to be an unsuccessful attempt to free Islamist militants. Meanwhile, insecurity linked to the presence of Boko Haram in the south-eastern region of Diffa continued to fuel displacement in this area.

12. During the reporting period, drug production, consumption and trafficking remained a serious concern. On 26 June, 20 tons of counterfeit medicines, cannabis and heroin were incinerated by Burkinabe authorities on the occasion of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, while 200 kilograms (kg) of cocaine were seized by Guinean authorities in the port of Conakry in July and October. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Guinea-Bissau and Mali remain vulnerable drug transit points, while production and distribution centres emerged in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Nigeria and Senegal. Some countries also witnessed an increase in arms trafficking and other illicit transnational activities. According to UNODC, law enforcement agencies in some countries were also involved in the sale of arms to militant groups and in receiving bribes from criminals at border posts to turn a blind eye to the illicit movement of goods and persons across borders.

13. Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea remained an issue of concern. The International Maritime Bureau recorded 28 kidnapping cases from July through August. Pirate activities seemed to shift their focus from the theft of cargo to the kidnapping of crew members. In the waters off the coast of Nigeria, 40 pirate attacks were allegedly carried out by the Niger Delta Avengers.

14. Nigeria continued to face several security challenges, in particular a resurgence of violence in the southern region of the Niger Delta, clashes between farmers and pastoralists in the Middle Belt region, the Boko Haram insurgency in the north of the country and violent incidents between security forces and members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. Between July and November, 80 attacks against oil installations were recorded in the Niger Delta. The Government is continuing with its dual strategy of negotiating with the attackers while simultaneously enhancing security measures. Meanwhile, between July and November, it is estimated that 30 deadly clashes between farmers and herders resulted in approximately 222 deaths, which threatened to undermine peace, social cohesion and food security in the Middle Belt of the country. In addition, on 14 November, clashes between individuals participating in a Shia procession and the Nigerian police force broke out in Kano State, resulting in the deaths of dozens of Nigerians.

Counter-terrorism and Boko Haram violence

15. Boko Haram continued to pose a security challenge in the Lake Chad Basin area. The Multinational Joint Task Force conducted several operations targeting the group's capabilities, disrupting its safe havens and destroying training and bomb-making facilities. This contributed to a temporary decline in the scope and impact of Boko Haram attacks during the rainy season (July and August). It is estimated that the group carried out approximately 179 attacks between July and November, which resulted in 330 deaths. This included two separate attacks, on 16 and 17 October, against security forces in Borno State, Nigeria, killing more than 20 soldiers. In addition, 46 soldiers who had disappeared during the attacks have not been found. During the reporting period, Boko Haram continued to use suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices and ambushes to incite fear. There were also reports of factional divisions within Boko Haram, with the reported leadership of the group being ascribed to Abu Musab al-Barnawi by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. In a video released on 10 August, the group's long-time leader, Abubakar Shekau, claimed he was still in charge.

16. Meanwhile, the Multinational Joint Task Force continued to strengthen its internal cooperation and operational capabilities, conducting successful operations in mid-September that resulted in the deaths of 70 Boko Haram militants in the Niger. Raids conducted by the Nigerian army on 19 August reportedly killed over 100 militants, including three senior Boko Haram commanders. On 13 October, following negotiations facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Government of Switzerland, 21 of the Chibok girls were released, bringing the number of girls freed to 23. According to the Nigerian Government, further negotiations continue for the release of the remaining girls. While several countries announced further logistical and intelligence support, the Task Force remains seriously constrained by a lack of funds and assets. A meeting of the African Union Partners Group on 23 September disclosed that most pledges had not materialized, with the exception of $34.3 million disbursed by the European Union, $21 million by Nigeria and $6.2 million by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland[4].

C. Socioeconomic trends

17. West African economies faced an economic landscape marked by a continuous slump in export commodity prices, tighter financing conditions, narrowing credit options, and concomitant budgetary pressures. According to the International Monetary Fund, during the reporting period, overall economic growth was at its lowest level in the past 12 years, and expectations for a rebound in 2016 have not materialized. While the performance and level of economic diversification varied between countries, oil-exporting countries appeared to be the hardest hit, with Nigeria officially entering into a recession. Efforts to improve access to foreign exchange in Nigeria were only partially successful and fostered the development of a parallel market. Countries exporting other raw materials, including Mauritania and Liberia, were equally affected by deteriorating terms of trade. Quickly depreciating currencies, such as in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, exacerbated economic hardship for large segments of the population. Growth prospects appeared to have improved for

Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, partially owing to regulatory reforms conducive to growth. In its report entitled "Doing Business 2016", the World Bank ranked Senegal and Benin in the top 10 most improved economies, while Liberia was reported as having deteriorated since 2008, ranking 174th of 190 countries.

D. Humanitarian trends

18. The overall humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains dire. In areas under the influence of Boko Haram, extreme levels of food insecurity and malnutrition were reported, including reports of emerging famine conditions. Across the Sahel, some 32 million people are facing food insecurity, 9 million are in need of emergency food assistance, and 3.9 million children under the age of 5 are severely malnourished. During the period under review, humanitarian access remained hampered by insecurity and ongoing hostilities. More than 130,000 Malian refugees remained in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger. In the conflict-affected regions of the Lake Chad Basin, 2.6 million people remained displaced, and 6.3 million people were considered severely food-insecure. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, almost 400,000 children in north-eastern Nigeria were severely malnourished. The majority of the displaced had been sheltered by communities that were already vulnerable, putting a further strain on their limited coping capacities. With the Nigerian army regaining control in areas formerly held by insurgents, nearly 800,000 people have become newly accessible, many of whom are in immediate need of life-saving assistance. Persistent attacks in Borno State (Nigeria), Diffa (Niger) and Maroua (Cameroon) continued to impede operations, while aid operations in Chad's border area were temporarily suspended owing to insecurity. While humanitarian organizations in the Lake Chad Basin countries stepped up operations to deliver assistance, only 30 per cent of the required funds, amounting to a total of $739 million, was received. Only 32 per cent ($664 million) of the United Nations appeal for $2.09 billion for the Sahel has been funded.

19. According to data released by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of recorded migrants passing through the Niger towards countries of the Maghreb has markedly decreased, following stricter control measures being implemented at major transit points and migrants without valid documentation being refused entry. However, migration flows in the Niger have increased significantly, with almost 400,000 outgoing and incoming migrants being registered at IOM flow monitoring points as of September. The migrants are mainly from the Gambia, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. In June, the European Council decided to use all relevant policies, instruments and tools, including development and trade, in order to prevent illegal migration and facilitate repatriations.

E. Trends on human rights

20. The human rights situation in West Africa and the Sahel improved somewhat with respect to legal and institutional frameworks. Senegal adopted a law reforming its constitutional court, and Burkina Faso and the Gambia registered progress towards the establishment of national human rights commissions. Togo acceded to

the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, while Guinea-Bissau adopted the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A total of 12 of the 15 States members of ECOWAS have thus far adopted the Conventions. In the Gambia, a law outlawing forced and underage marriage was passed.

21. However, the continuing threat of terrorism had a negative impact on human rights standards across West Africa and the Sahel, in particular with respect to freedom of expression and assembly. Several thousand terror suspects were reportedly held in pretrial detention for extended periods in the Niger, where the legal pretrial detention time is four years. Although penal reforms in terrorism-related cases were initiated in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal, arbitrary incarcerations continued to pose the risk of radicalizing detainees in West Africa and the Sahel.

22. In Nigeria, the special investigation panel established by the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission to investigate clashes between security forces and members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, which took place in December 2015 and resulted in about 350 casualties, submitted its report on 21 October. The panel recommended, inter alia, a forensic investigation, the timely trial of the Movement's leaders, the prosecution of involved military personnel, compensation for victims and training in crowd management for police. Concerns continue to be raised regarding possible violations of human rights by some security forces in the fight against Boko Haram, notwithstanding the commitment by the Government to take action.

23. In the Gambia, a senior member of the opposition United Democratic Party, Ebrima Solo Kurumah, reportedly died under unclear circumstances while in police custody on 21 August. Mr. Kurumah was arrested during a peaceful protest on 9 May. He is the second member of the United Democratic Party to have died in custody, following the death of opposition activist Ebrima Solo Sandeng on 15 April. On 20 July, 29 Party members were sentenced to three years in prison on several charges, including unlawful assembly. Calls by the international community for an independent investigation into the events of April and May, including the deaths of two opposition members while in state custody, have thus far gone unheeded. Meanwhile, three days after the announcement of the election results, the former leader of the opposition United Democratic Party, Ousainou Darboe, along with 18 Party members who had been sentenced, in July, to three years in prison, were released on bail. On 8 December, 11 more people who had been arrested after participating in peaceful protests in April and May were also released.

24. In Guinea, as part of the political dialogue process concluded on 12 October, political stakeholders agreed, inter alia, to establish a high court of justice and to release those detained in the wake of political protests. However, on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the 28 September 2009 massacre, human rights defenders and victims' associations expressed concern about continuing delays in the prosecution of perpetrators, some of whom were in public office. On 29 June, the Provisional Commission for Reflection on National Reconciliation submitted its report to President Alpha Condé, who committed to setting up a truth, justice and reconciliation commission to investigate major violations of human rights in Guinea from 1958 to 2015.

25. In Mauritania, tensions were witnessed between public authorities and the Initiative pour la résurgence du mouvement abolitionniste, especially after 13 Intiative members were sentenced on 18 August to prison terms of between 3 and 15 years, following protests staged by the organization. The West African Human Rights Defenders' Network and other organizations condemned the verdict, and the European Union called for an investigation into judicial procedures and allegations of torture. On 18 November, the appeal court of Zouerate acquitted and released three of the 13 activists and reduced the sentence of the other 10.

26. On 29 July, the Extraordinary African Chambers within the Senegalese courts ordered former Chadian President Hissène Habré to pay 53 billion CFA francs to compensate the nearly 5,000 victims of arbitrary detention, acts of rape, sexual slavery, torture and war crimes committed under his rule. On 28 September, Appeal Court judges for his case were appointed by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

F. Trends on gender issues

27. During the reporting period, some progress was made in efforts to support gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of women in political, peace and security processes. On 29 September, the Liberian House of Representatives passed the Equal Representation and Participation Bill, which provided for five seats for female politicians, one for youth and one for people with disabilities in the nation's lower House of Parliament. The Nigerian Senate continued its examination of the gender and equal opportunities bill, raising hopes for its eventual adoption. Civil society and other organizations continued their advocacy to enhance female political participation. A study released in September by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis in Benin revealed that the literacy rate of young women in the country dropped from 56 to 43 per cent between 2010 and 2015, highlighting the structural factors leading to female exclusion.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments by my Special Representative

28. During the reporting period, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued in order to mobilize international and regional partners through his good offices missions to support national political dialogue, promote democratic reforms and encourage transparent and peaceful electoral processes. He conducted his missions in close collaboration with the United Nations country teams in each country.

29. Ahead of the presidential election in the Gambia on 1 December, and in the light of prevailing tensions in the country, my Special Representative conducted a mission to Banjul on 10 November. He held consultations with political parties, civil society representatives and election management bodies, during which he assured all stakeholders of the continued support of the United Nations. He urged

the Government to deliver on its commitments to democratic governance and appealed to political actors to engage in genuine political dialogue. My Special Representative visited Banjul again, a day after the announcement of the election results, on 3 December, where he met with the President-elect, representatives of the opposition coalition, the ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation, civil society and the diplomatic corps. The head of the ECOWAS office in Banjul accompanied my Special Representative to his meetings. In his consultations, the Special Representative encouraged all sides to work together for a peaceful transfer of power. Following President Jammeh's announcement on 9 December rejecting the election results, the Special Representative facilitated a joint statement by the African Union, ECOWAS and United Nations, which was issued on 10 December and called on the Government of the Gambia to abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations; to respect the verdict of the ballots; and to ensure the security of President-elect Adama Barrow and of all Gambian citizens. The following day, I called on President Jammeh and all political actors to fully respect the outcome of the election and carry out a peaceful and orderly transition process. On 13 December, my Special Representative returned to Banjul along with President Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia — in her capacity as head of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government — President Koroma of Sierra Leone, outgoing President Mahama of Ghana, President Buhari of Nigeria and a representative of the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs.

30. Special Representative Chambas visited Ghana four times between October and December to help defuse political tensions and promote peaceful elections. His good offices, in collaboration with ECOWAS and other partners, were instrumental in ensuring the signing of the peace accord prior to the elections. The Electoral Commission in Ghana expressed appreciation for the support of the United Nations country team to the electoral process, including United Nations assistance in coordinating international observers and support to two situation rooms (the Women's Situation Room and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding observer situation room).

31. During the reporting period, my Special Representative remained in contact with stakeholders engaged in the political dialogue process in Guinea. He met with President Alpha Condé in New York on 20 September and visited Guinea on 8 and 9 November. In his consultations with stakeholders, including President Condé and opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo, he commended the parties for the agreement reached on 12 October and reiterated the support of the United Nations in the implementation of its provisions.

32. In anticipation of the first post-conflict presidential elections to be held in Sierra Leone without the presence of a United Nations peace mission, scheduled for early 2018, my Special Representative conducted a mission to Freetown from 6 to 8 November, during which he consulted with relevant stakeholders on a number of critical issues, including the constitutional review process and electoral preparations.

33. My Special Representative visited Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, Nigeria, in July and November. He interacted with a wide range of government representatives, humanitarian actors, United Nations agencies and civil society. He discussed challenges to rehabilitation efforts, humanitarian access and the demining

of recaptured territories, for which international support remains crucial. He also paid a visit to a camp for internally displaced persons in Bakassi, where humanitarian assistance had been halted for security reasons, and advocated for the resumption of humanitarian assistance to the camp.

34. While in Nigeria, my Special Representative also held, on 1 August, a round-table consultation with high-level Nigerian stakeholders, ECOWAS, the United Nations country team and representatives from academia and civil society, on violent extremism, militant activities, separatist tendencies in the south-east, tensions between pastoralists and farmers and other political and security-related issues affecting the country. The meeting helped strengthen cooperation with Nigerian stakeholders and reaffirm the United Nations support for the consolidation of the peace architecture in Nigeria.

35. On 21 September, President Buhari requested United Nations assistance in negotiating the release of the Chibok schoolgirls. In response, I designated my Special Representative, in his capacity as my High-level Representative for Nigeria, as the point of contact for further assistance. Since then, he has been engaging with Nigerian authorities and international partners. In his consultations, he has continued to stress the need for the international community to support Nigeria in addressing the issue of mass abductions by Boko Haram, the rehabilitation and reintegration of abductees and better humanitarian access in the north-east of the country. My Special Representative visited Nigeria from 13 to 18 November to meet with national and international stakeholders to determine how best to continue supporting the Nigerian Government's efforts in finding a negotiated solution for the release of the remaining Chibok schoolgirls.

Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

36. Insecurity in the northern Cameroon-Nigeria border areas, as a result of Boko Haram-related violence, continued to adversely affect the work of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, delaying field assessments and demarcation in several locations. Nonetheless, experts from both parties met in early December 2015 and reached an agreement on toponyms within a 30-kilometre corridor along both sides of the border, as part of the final mapping project. In addition, a project document on confidence-building measures was endorsed by the Government of Cameroon in May 2016 and submitted for approval by the Nigerian Government in late November.

37. On 1 August, in his capacity as my High-level Representative to Nigeria and Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative held consultations in Abuja with President Buhari, who reiterated his commitment to a speedy resolution of the residual issues concerning the border demarcation. He also met with the head of the Nigerian delegation and other government officials in December 2016. The parties reiterated their commitment to fully implementing the judgment of the International Court of Justice as a matter of priority. By the end of the reporting period, significant progress towards the placement of 163 additional pillars had been achieved, thus exhausting the remaining resources in the extrabudgetary trust fund. My Special Representative therefore undertook a fundraising mission to Brussels, Paris, London and Berlin from 18 to 20 October, during which partners voiced appreciation for the Commission's work and pledged

support for the conclusion of its mandate, pending the submission of more detailed proposals.

Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

Security sector reform

38. From 17 to 21 October, UNOWAS, together with other United Nations representatives, visited the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja to provide additional support for the rolling-out of the ECOWAS policy framework on security sector reform, which is aimed at promoting a coordinated approach to security sector reform in the West Africa region.

39. In Guinea, the United Nations senior security sector reform advisory team continued to support the national security sector reform process. On 29 September, the national police school was reopened, after 16 years of closure, with the support of the team. The senior adviser also supported efforts to render the high council of national defence operational. In response to a request made by President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of Burkina Faso, the senior adviser, together with UNOWAS, conducted a mission to Ouagadougou to assist the Government of Burkina Faso in the development of a security sector reform road map.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

40. From 23 to 28 October and 1 to 4 November, UNOWAS visited Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively, to explore options for advancing implementation of the strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union. Discussions with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations Mission in Liberia and relevant partners helped to identify priority activities currently supported by the peacekeeping operations, which UNOWAS and the respective United Nations country teams should help to sustain after the drawdown of the missions. From 30 November to 1 December, the Mano River Union secretariat, with UNOWAS support, organized a subregional workshop on lessons learned following the establishment of the Mano River Union joint border security and confidence-building units in Monrovia. Participants also exchanged views on initiatives to enhance cross-border cooperation and curb transnational organized crime.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

41. During the reporting period, the Economic Community of Central African States and ECOWAS advanced their efforts to operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé, including by completing the recruitment of senior leadership staff. The ECOWAS Commission and Côte d'Ivoire are in the final stages of finalizing agreements for the establishment of the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa, which will be based in Abidjan. Negotiations are also continuing between the ECOWAS Commission and Ghana on logistical arrangements for hosting the headquarters for zone F, which comprises Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Some progress was also made towards the operationalization of the headquarters for zone E, which covers Benin,

the Niger, Nigeria and Togo, and is based in Cotonou. In his meetings, my Special Representative continued to support efforts by ECOWAS to identify a headquarters for zone G, which comprises Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal.

42. In the framework of the consultations between African countries, China and the United States of America to promote peace in Africa, my Special Representative attended a tripartite consultation meeting between African countries, China and the United States, organized by the Carter Center in cooperation with the Government of Togo and held in Lomé on 27 and 28 July. His participation and subsequent engagement helped to strengthen cooperation between regional actors, China, the United States and other partners on maritime security and economic development.

43. My Special Representative attended the African Union Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa, held in Lomé on 15 October, at which the African Union Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development was adopted. During the side events that took place prior to the Summit, from 10 to 14 October, discussions focused on the need to boost the implementation of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture and strengthen the judicial response, including the prosecution of maritime crimes.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

44. On 5 September, UNOWAS attended the ECOWAS ministerial conference in Abuja, at which participants, together with Mauritania, adopted the 2016-2020 regional action plan on illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse in West Africa. On 19 October, my Special Representative attended the launching ceremony for the action plan in New York, which focused on mobilizing resources for its implementation. With respect to the West Africa Coast Initiative, while the work of the Transnational Organized Crime Units in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone is continuing, no progress has been made in operationalizing the Units in Côte d'Ivoire or Guinea.

B. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

45. In response to the Security Council's call (see S/2016/89) for further progress towards the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, an independent evaluation was undertaken in October and November 2016 to look into the design, scope, thematic focus and implementation modalities of the strategy and provide recommendations to improve its implementation. The evaluation team interviewed a broad range of national and international partners at United Nations Headquarters and in Dakar, and visited the five member States of the Group of Five for the Sahel to conduct closer consultations with authorities and local and international stakeholders. The team's recommendations are reflected in my forthcoming proposal to the Security Council on the renewal of the mandate of UNOWAS and in ongoing efforts to review, at the operational level, the United Nations system's approach to the implementation of the integrated strategy, including its thematic focus, priorities, coordination arrangements, partnerships and

the role of specific United Nations entities in the field and at Headquarters, in line with their respective mandates and comparative advantages.

46. As co-chairs of the technical secretariat of the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel, my Special Representative and President Pierre Buyoya, High Representative of the African Union for Mali and the Sahel and Head of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), conducted a joint visit to N'Djamena from 4 to 8 August in order to reactivate the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel. In order to make progress on preparations for the next meeting of the Platform, a joint UNOWAS-MISAHEL technical-level mission visited Chad from 7 to 10 September.

47. Throughout the reporting period, efforts to improve coordination and secure funding for the implementation of the strategy intensified, with regular information exchanges between United Nations entities and external partners, including the Group of Five for the Sahel and potential donors. The three thematic working groups of the strategy — on governance, security and resilience — held regular meetings to improve programme delivery, including joint activities with regional entities.

48. Cognizant of the key role that Sahel countries play in countering violent extremism and pursuant to the Security Council's request (see S/PRST/2015/24), UNOWAS and other partners made efforts to strengthen the role of the Group of Five for the Sahel in this area. From 29 August to 1 September, UNOWAS provided support to a delegation of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force that visited the region to hold consultations with countries of the Group. This included a meeting, organized by UNOWAS and the Task Force, that brought together 40 regional experts and United Nations agencies to discuss support to the Group through the Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism Initiative, which focuses on building the capacities of Governments to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, in line with the integrated strategy and as mandated by the Security Council (see resolution 2195 (2014) and S/PRST/2015/24).

49. UNOWAS also contributed to a conference on preventing violent extremism, organized by the African Union in partnership with the Group of Five for the Sahel and held in Bamako from 11 to 13 October. The meeting was the first in a series of events aimed at developing a regional action plan. It was attended by a wide range of representatives from countries of the Group and Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal. Recommendations included strengthening media networks with a view to reinforcing counter-radicalization narratives. UNOWAS also continued to provide support to the permanent secretariat of the Group in operationalizing its threat analysis and early warning mechanism, which will be based in Nouakchott. It further assisted the Group in the development of guidelines for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

50. Thanks to technical assistance provided by UNODC under the security pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, authorities in Mali carried out a number of drug seizures, including one, in August, in Mopti, of over 400 grams of cocaine mixed with ephedrine with a market value of more than $20,000. In October, they also arrested the alleged head of the international drug trafficking ring responsible for the trafficking of 2.7 tons of cannabis that had been seized in Bamako aboard a truck coming from Ghana in May. The arrest was made possible

through regional cooperation channels, as Malian authorities were able to locate the suspect in the Niger by exchanging information with their Senegalese counterparts. This was the first recorded instance in Mali's history of an international drug network being dismantled. In the Niger, the Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force at the Niamey International Airport intercepted some 9 kg of smuggled gold and €500,000 of undeclared currency on two passengers in October, highlighting the unit's capacity to counter forms of transnational organized crime that go beyond drug trafficking. UNODC also provided support to an anti-corruption awareness-raising campaign in the Niger and, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, helped universities in Burkina Faso to establish a master's degree programme on anti-corruption.

51. Under the governance pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, a joint mission, comprising representatives from IOM, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR, was conducted in the Sahel region from 1 to 10 November to support the development of cross-border projects, funded from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. The project is aimed at promoting stability, building resilience and preventing the spread of violent extremism in border areas in the Liptako-Gourma region of Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger. During the mission's visit to Mali from 1 to 5 November, programmatic entry points were identified to address conflict drivers in the region bordering Burkina Faso and the Niger. The findings of the mission were validated by the United Nations, civil society organizations and government officials from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger during a three-day workshop held in Ouagadougou from 7 to 10 November. PBSO is currently developing cross-border project documents, in line with the integrated strategy, to support the countries' efforts to tackle the root causes of conflict in the region.

52. With regard to the resilience pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the Governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger met on several occasions within the framework of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project, led by the United Nations Population Fund, which seeks to address demographic challenges in the Sahel. During a high-level symposium on the demographic dividend and Africa's development, organized in Dakar on 29 June, and a high-level dialogue on strengthening partnership to accelerate Africa's demographic dividend, organized in New York on 19 September, a road map with an emphasis on youth empowerment was developed by participating Governments to address the root causes of insecurity in the Sahel.

53. Further to the request of the Security Council, contained in its presidential statement of 8 December 2015, for "detailed information on the financial contributions towards boosting economic growth and eradicating poverty, through projects that would support peace and security efforts in the Sahel region" (S/PRST/2015/24), the Secretariat undertook consultations with the relevant entities concerning the pledges made to Sahelian countries, announced during the joint high-level visit to the Sahel by the United Nations, African Union, World Bank, African Development Bank and European Union in November 2013. According to its data, the World Bank has committed over $7.2 billion since 2013 to 13 Sahel countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and the Sudan), of which

$5.1 billion has been disbursed. Of the $7.2 billion pledged to the Sahel, the World Bank committed $1.9 billion and disbursed $1.6 billion to countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel. Meanwhile, according to its data, the European Union committed $3 billion to the 13 countries of the Sahel in 2013 and $3.1 billion in 2014, of which approximately one third was committed to countries of the Group. The European Union disbursed $3.6 billion to the 13 countries of the Sahel in 2013 and $2.8 billion in 2014, which included disbursements of $1 billion and $0.9 billion in countries of the Group in 2013 and 2014. Those figures do not take into account the additional funding mobilized for operational deployments such as African Union and United Nations missions in Mali (MISAHEL and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), the European Union Training Mission in Mali, the European Union Capacity Building Missions in Mali and the Niger and other contributions that do not qualify as official development assistance but nonetheless support peace and security efforts. In November 2015, the European Union also established an emergency trust fund for stability and to address the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. The fund includes $1 billion in earmarked funding for the Sahel and Lake Chad regions.

C. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

54. UNOWAS participated in a forum for non-governmental organizations, organized by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies and held in Banjul from 17 to 19 October, which aimed at enhancing the participation of non-governmental organizations in the fifty-ninth ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. On the margins of the forum, UNOWAS co-chaired a panel on strengthening the capacity of national and regional civil society networks. Upon conclusion of the forum, the non-governmental organizations adopted nine resolutions that were later submitted for consideration by the Commission. On 21 October, UNOWAS participated in the fifty-ninth ordinary session of the Commission, also held in Banjul.

55. As part of a mission to Ouagadougou together with the Department of Political Affairs, PBSO and UNDP, from 28 June to 5 July, UNOWAS contributed to an assessment aimed at strengthening the capacities of the High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity of Burkina Faso, which led to the development of a project aimed at reinforce the Council's capacity.

56. During the reporting period, UNOWAS efforts to promote the role of women and youth in conflict prevention focused on creating synergies among regional organizations while raising awareness regarding Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, youth, and peace and security, including resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2250 (2015). In this regard, in August and September, UNOWAS and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women met with regional members of the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in West Africa, coordinated outreach missions of the Working Group to Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger, and held a workshop with academic partners in Ouagadougou on 14 October. In addition, UNOWAS supported the re-establishment of the ECOWAS West African Network of Young Female Leaders.

D. Inter-institutional cooperation

United Nations inter-institutional cooperation

57. From 9 to 11 November, UNOWAS participated in an inter-agency mission to Burkina Faso, led by the Department of Political Affairs. The purpose of the mission was to hold consultations with national authorities and relevant stakeholders for the development of a strategic framework for the implementation of a pilot approach on "sustaining peace", in line with the twin Security Council and General Assembly resolutions (Council resolution 2282 (2016) and Assembly resolution 70/262), to help Burkina Faso to consolidate stability in the post-transition period. The strategy will be supported by all levels of the United Nations system and will emphasize political support, alignment with regional approaches and strong linkages with national planning processes in support of stabilization tasks such as national reconciliation. The approach also foresees the enhancement of partnerships with international financial institutions. In close collaboration with UNDP and other United Nations entities, UNOWAS will play a central role in the implementation of the strategy for sustaining peace.

Cooperation with regional and subregional partners

58. On 20 October, UNOWAS and ECOWAS held a desk-to-desk meeting at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja. The meeting discussed priority areas for cooperation in 2017, including joint early warning and fact-finding missions to risk-prone countries, and cross-cutting thematic areas such as the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. In line with the UNOWAS-Mano River Union cooperation framework workplan that was adopted in May, a technical meeting was held on 9 November to review progress and plan joint activities in 2017. Following the establishment of the UNOWAS liaison cell in Nouakchott in April, UNOWAS focused on facilitating United Nations engagement with the Group of Five for the Sahel.

IV. Observations and recommendations

59. The overall situation in the West Africa and Sahel subregions during the reporting period was positive. I was particularly encouraged by the successful holding of peaceful and credible elections in Cabo Verde and Ghana and by the outcome of the political dialogue in Guinea. I was also encouraged by the steps taken to develop and institute political, institutional and constitutional reforms in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. I urge national stakeholders to continue to engage in dialogue in a spirit of tolerance, openness and inclusivity.

60. I welcome the measures taken by the United Nations system, in partnership with the authorities of Burkina Faso, to pilot a new approach to sustaining peace in the country, including the development of a strategic framework to help consolidate stability in the post-transition period. I commend the authorities for the work undertaken, with United Nations support, to reform and reorganize the security sector and to support national reconciliation. I call on institutional partners and

donors to support those efforts and ensure close coordination as part of a wider partnership to support Burkina Faso in consolidating stability and democratic gains.

61. I am dismayed by the 9 December statement by President Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh of the Gambia rejecting the outcome of the 1 December presidential election. I reiterate my earlier call for a peaceful, timely and orderly transfer of power, in full respect of the will of the Gambian people as expressed in the election. I urge the Security Council to continue to support the efforts of the people of the Gambia, ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations for a speedy and peaceful transfer of power.

62. I remain worried by the prevalence of terrorist and violent extremist threats in the region and their linkages to transnational organized crime. While I commend the commitment by concerned Member States, regional organizations and other partners to step up efforts, with United Nations support, to prevent and counter violent extremism, I encourage further collaboration to address the underlying drivers relating to development, social exclusion, environmental degradation and governance.

63. The escalation of militant activities in the Niger Delta region and the incidents of violence between pastoralists and farmers in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria are also worrisome. In that regard, my Special Representative will continue to support efforts to strengthen the national peace architecture in the country with a view to addressing internal security challenges that have the potential to spill over.

64. I commend the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for its continued efforts to implement the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002. I am encouraged by the continued cooperation between the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria to ensure the completion of the border demarcation, implement confidence-building measures and protect the rights of the affected border communities. My Special Representative will continue to provide good offices to help to resolve any outstanding issues and assist the two parties in mobilizing resources.

65. I welcome the leadership demonstrated by countries in West Africa and the Sahel in advancing democracy and spearheading initiatives to tackle security challenges in the region. I commend the sustained efforts made by participating countries for the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which led to a reduction in the number of casualties due to Boko Haram attacks. I encourage stronger partnership among affected countries, as well as between them and the African Union, and reiterate my call for all counter-insurgency efforts to be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I welcome the assistance provided by regional and international partners, but remain very concerned about the continuing humanitarian toll in the region. I urge donors to support the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad Basin, which remains critically underfunded, and to intensify demining, rehabilitation and resettlement efforts while addressing the underlying root causes that led to the emergence of Boko Haram. My Special Representative, in his capacity as my High-level Representative for Nigeria, will continue to reach out to relevant stakeholders to build momentum with a view to facilitating the release of Boko Haram abductees.

66. I am encouraged that the pledges made during the joint visit to the Sahel by the United Nations, African Union, World Bank, African Development Bank and

European Union in 2013 were followed up with concrete financial commitments and disbursements. I commend the donor community for their generous support to the region and encourage Governments in the region and development partners to explore innovative ways to use these resources to achieve greater development impact. I also call on all stakeholders to take the steps required to create the security and political conditions necessary for the implementation of development assistance in the Sahel region.

67. I commend the close cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Group of Five for the Sahel, the European Union and other partners in support of stability in the Sahel region and reiterate the dedication of the United Nations to ensuring the effective implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, in close collaboration with Member States, regional organizations and other stakeholders. The United Nations will take into account the conclusions of the independent evaluation to revise the strategy's implementation modalities, including its thematic focus, coordination arrangements, partnerships and distribution of responsibilities among United Nations entities in the field and at Headquarters.

68. In view of the broad range of challenges to peace and stability that West Africa and the Sahel continue to face and the continuous need for support to the efforts of regional and subregional organizations to promote peace, stability and good governance, I recommend that the mandate of UNOWAS be extended for a period of three years, from 1 January 2017 until 31 December 2019. I will submit a detailed description of the proposed mandate in a letter to the President of the Security Council.

69. In conclusion, I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the ECOWAS Commission, the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Mano River Union and the Group of Five for the Sahel for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS in the implementation of its mandate. I express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, the staff of UNOWAS and the staff of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.